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SUBJECT: SCENESETTER FOR NSA HADLEY'S NOVEMBER 3-4 VISIT TO
PARIS

Classified By: DCM Karl Hofmann for reasons 1.4 (B & D).

¶1. (C) When you meet him, Maurice Gourdault-Montagne's focus will be on some of the same subjects that are currently preoccupying us: Iran, Syria/Lebanon and NATO (global partnerships, Afghanistan.) We would expect MGM to be in his usual cooperative, problem-solving mode on the first two, where are perspectives largely coincide. Our differences over NATO's role continue to translate into French resistance to U.S. initiatives. Even more worrying, there is the possibility Chirac's increasingly pessimistic prognosis for Afghanistan may trigger a gradual French disengagement there.

¶2. (C) MGM operates in a peculiar domestic context. All attention is fixed on the leading contenders for the Presidency, Nicolas Sarkozy and Segolene Royal. Chirac, although he claims not to have ruled out running again next year, is a lame duck whose popularity and authority has only marginally rebounded from the historically low levels reached early this past summer. Despite his political eclipse, Chirac remains dominant on foreign policy. There are no institutional checks and balances, either within the bureaucracy, or across France's other branches of government, that permit a challenge to the policy direction set by the Presidency. Nor is there much campaign discussion or criticism of Chirac's policies. All of that puts MGM in a position of unusual influence, making all the more valuable the relationship you have developed with him.

¶3. (C) Given your ongoing telephonic dialogue with him, you will have a much better feel than we for MGM's views on next steps on Iran. We offer here, however, broad assessments of where the French are on Iran and the other key issues that will likely make up your meeting agenda, including also Russia and Georgia. Iraq looms in the background.

¶4. (S) Iran: As you know, France has been among the most steadfast on the Iranian nuclear issue, largely owing to Chirac's profound mistrust of Iran (and Shia generally) and his refusal to countenance the possibility of Iran as a nuclear power. Chirac does differ with us over sanctions. He has long opposed them, reflecting French energy and commercial interests. This opposition is dressed up as a matter of principle (sanctions simply don't work: if they are too broad they become politically counterproductive, if they are too fine-tuned they don't have bite). In the case of Iran, Chirac has been prepared to make an exception. But he will continue to be wary of anything too ambitious, and will stress the need for UNSC consensus. Chirac's call, on the eve of his UNGA visit, for synchronized suspension of Iranian enrichment activities and UN consideration of sanctions was testimony to a continuing over-riding priority: finding a diplomatic solution to the current impasse. Israel's "disproportionate" response to Hizballah surprised and spooked the French, alarmed by a possible lowering of Israel's threshold for action against Iran itself. Although the GOF has not responded to a recent Iranian suggestion

calling for an international consortium for enrichment in Iran, we do not believe they have ruled out the idea completely.

15. (C) Syria-Lebanon: Our solidarity with France on Lebanon and Syria remains strong, and is the vital lubricant that facilitates cooperation on the broad range of our interests in the Middle East. The French share our interest in supporting PM Siniora, agree that we must help him fend off the current effort by Hizballah and General Aoun to undermine his government, and recognize that the implementation of UNSCR 1701 is critical to Lebanon's stability now and in the future. But we do not always see eye to eye on how to make progress within that framework, and the French remain allergic to the idea of coordinating our security assistance to the LAF. Moreover, the deployment of French peacekeepers has created a dynamic that increasingly threatens to pit France's interest in minimizing the vulnerability of its soldiers against Israel's interest in maximizing pressure on Hizballah to disarm. The clearest manifestation of this inherent tension was President Chirac's call for Israel to end its violations of Lebanese airspace, but it is also visible in the Quai's eagerness to resolve the status of the Sheba'a Farms in Lebanon's favor, something you have often heard MGM discuss. In short, the French see Israeli compliance with UNSCR 1701 as the path of least resistance to establishing UNIFIL's credibility and strengthening PM Siniora. Our challenge will be to keep the French focused on the far more critical questions of disarming Hizballah and enforcing the arms embargo.

16. (C) Syria: The French will likely probe for evidence of any softening of the U.S. position. They are intensely interested in the comments former Secretary Baker has made about the utility of talking to one's enemies, and are

alarmed by the notion that the confluence of U.S. interests with respect to Iraq, Iran and the Palestinians may lead to a re-thinking of our Syria policy. Any reassurance you can give will be helpful.

17. (C) Iraq: While the French have become more pragmatic about Iraq, Chirac firmly believes that subsequent events have vindicated his opposition to the war) and we see little prospect of any substantive French commitment to Iraq during the remainder of his presidency. The good news: President Talabani is expected here on November 2; the French will almost certainly attend the signing ceremony for the Iraq Compact; and the French have not evinced any interest in complicating the extension of the UN mandate for Coalition Forces in Iraq.

18. (C) NATO: As noted, France and the U.S. do not see eye-to-eye on two major issues for the Riga Summit -- Global Partnership and Afghanistan. On partnership, the main French concern seems to be a theological one -- that the U.S. has in mind an overly-formalized, U.S.-led set of global partnerships. On Afghanistan, we are concerned that Chirac's belief that Afghanistan is heading in the wrong direction -- and therefore will not permit French forces to be deployed in the south and east -- could turn into a self-fulfilling prophecy that the French would then use to call NATO a failure.

19. (C) Russia (and Georgia): French officials understand that Russia is heading down the wrong path but are reluctant to be tough with the Russians, given memories of Russia's shared opposition to the Iraq war and Russia's increasingly hefty energy influence. Hiding behind the EU, they tried to stall on NATO Intensified Dialogue for Georgia as long as possible. They are deeply concerned that independence for Kosovo could impel Russia to support the same for Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

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